

VZCZCXR07914
PP RUEHPA RUEHTRO
DE RUEHNK #0261/01 1020931
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 120931Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8314
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0576
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0514
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2119
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0924
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0592
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 0149
RHMFIS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHMFIS/COMSOEUR VAIHINGEN GE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHDS/USMISSION USAU ADDIS ABABA
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0600
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1033

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000261

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/08/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL KPAO KDEM MR

SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: POLITICAL ROUNDUP FOR THE WEEK OF
APRIL 5-9

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 250
1B. NOUAKCHOTT 247
1C. NOUAKCHOTT 246
1D. NOUAKCHOTT 251

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (SBU) Summary: For the week of April 5-9, anti-coup sentiment was visible in several venues. The EU suspended cooperation with Mauritania for two years, while an unfortunate translation of a NATO statement sowed confusion. The national electoral commission was finally appointed, while former PM Zein Ould Zeidane denied harboring any presidential ambitions for the upcoming elections. A suspected Salafist died in prison, and the FNDD staged a major rally in Capital Stadium. General Aziz remained coy about his own presidential candidacy in an interview with a French news channel, but did confirm that "God willing" he will resign before April 22. End summary.

12. (SBU) Anti-coup protests: Two anti-coup protests were violently dispersed April 2 and 3, resulting in several injuries (Ref A).

13. (SBU) Anti-coup graffiti: Conscience and Resistance, a Mauritanian leftist group, spray-painted various anti-Aziz and anti-coup slogans on walls around town. Such activities date back to the time of President Taya, when Conscience and Resistance carried out similar actions. "HIGH STATE COUNCIL = TRAITORS" and "AZIZ IS A THIEF" were representative of the spray-painted slogans.

14. (C) FNDD distrusts Senegalese: Charge met April 5 with FNDD co-leader and UFP President Mohamed Ould Maouloud, who expressed skepticism regarding the latest attempt to "mediate" the crisis, this time by the Senegalese (Ref B).

15. (SBU) EU suspends cooperation: On April 6 the EU suspended cooperation with Mauritania for two years. The suspension was the end result of months of EU deliberations, and closed the EU dossier on Mauritania. The EU stated that the junta had not taken sufficient measures to restore constitutional order; therefore, all non-humanitarian aid would be suspended. Reaction in the local press to the EU decision was muted.

¶6. (SBU) NATO statement confusion: A misleading French translation of the original April 4 NATO statement regarding Mauritania (Ref C) caused excitement in the pro-coup camp, and consternation in the anti-coup camp. The French version said that NATO is "delighted with the prospect of a return to constitutional order," a misrepresentation of the original, more neutral English statement that said NATO is "looking forward to the return of constitutional order."

¶7. (SBU) Electoral commission selected: Members for the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) were selected April 6, and Aziz swore in the new commission April 7 (Ref D).

¶8. (SBU) University students demonstrate: Several university students demonstrated April 7 about the delay in payments for their stipends. They burned tires, and attempted to exit the university en masse to demonstrate. Riot police used tear gas to force them back into the university and only allowed them to exit individually, not as a group. The economic implications of the students' situation is discussed SEPTEL.

¶9. (SBU) NAFTEC bankruptcy: Rumors of NAFTEC bankruptcy appeared in the press. NAFTEC (Arabic for "Your Oil") is an oil importation and distribution company; see SEPTEL for more information.

¶10. (C) Return of Zeidane: Rumors of a presidential candidacy by Zein Ould Zeidane, President Abdallahi's first

NOUAKCHOTT 00000261 002 OF 003

prime minister, appeared in the press. Zeidane has remained very quiet since the coup as to his opinions and plans. PolOff met with Zeidane at his residence April 7, where he denied reports in the press that he would run for President, claiming he is "disgusted with politics."

¶11. (SBU) Suspected Salafist dies in prison: Local press reports stated that Cheikhani Ould Sidina, brother of Sidi Ould Sidina, died in prison April 8 in Nouakchott. Both brothers were accused of being terrorists and belonging to Salafist groups; Sidi Ould Sidina was directly involved in the murder of four French tourists near Aleg in December 2007. A spokesman for the families of the imprisoned Salafists stated that Cheikhani had been tortured recently while in prison and was denied medical treatment. Local press reports also stated that Salafist inmates had started a hunger strike after Sidina's death to protest ongoing mistreatment.

¶12. (C) Presidential pardon: Local press reports also stated that 68 prisoners, some of them Salafists, would receive a presidential pardon and be released. In a press conference held a few hours after news of Sidina's death spread, junta-designated Minister of Justice Bal Amadou Tidjane denied that there was any relation between Sidina's death and the amnesty. Comment: Tidjane's assertion that there was "no connection" between the two events is hard to swallow. Given the 2008 Amnesty International report detailing torture in Mauritanian prisons, the junta was probably eager to try and deflect any negative press. There may be another factor at work as well; an NGO worker at the main prison told Post (and local press reports corroborated) that Nouakchott's prisons are extremely overcrowded. The main prison, ironically located in the "Dar Naim" neighborhood (Arabic for "House of Happiness") was built for 300 prisoners; it currently holds more than 1,200. Holding an amnesty may be a way for the junta to ease overcrowding (albeit slightly) and more importantly, try to gain favor from the population ahead of elections. End comment.

¶13. (C) FNDD "mega-meeting": The FNDD obtained a permit to hold a rally (which they termed a "mega-meeting") in the Capital Stadium April 8. Turnout was large, though estimates varied wildly: the FNDD claimed eight to ten thousand were

present, while the police stated four to five thousand were present. RSO SD members estimated the crowd at about 3,000-3,500 people. In any case, attendance was strong, considering it was an overt anti-junta event, and equaled or rivaled that of the RFD rally held last week in the same venue. The usual FNDD leaders were present, as well as five leaders from RFD, whom National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir made sure to praise for their attendance.

(Note: Ahmed Ould Daddah is currently traveling abroad. End note.) Boulkheir further called upon the people of Nouadhibou and Selibaby to boycott upcoming visits from General Aziz, and stated that Aziz "will not be president, whatever he does."

¶14. (SBU) Aziz grants TV interview: Despite continuing rumors about a possible delay for the June 6 presidential elections, Aziz stated clearly in an interview April 8 with the "France 24" satellite channel that elections will still be held June 6. Moreover, according to him, "85-90% of Mauritians want these elections." (France 24 did two interviews with Aziz, one in French and one in Arabic.) Regarding his own possible candidacy in the upcoming elections, Aziz was vague in both interviews, saying he was still "thinking and reflecting on it." Regarding his resignation from the military and President of the High State Council, Aziz was vague in the French interview as well. In the Arabic interview however, he was slightly more forthcoming, saying "My resignation will be before April 22, God willing... and the President of the Senate will be the interim president, God willing, according to the Constitution." Comment: Despite headlines in the local press shouting Aziz's supposed announced candidacy, there still has not been an official formal announcement from him

NOUAKCHOTT 00000261 003 OF 003

where he has said definitively that he is running (though this is widely regarded as being a foregone conclusion). End comment.

¶15. (C) Baba's dissidence from RFD: PolOff met April 8 with RFD Vice President Kane Hamidou Baba who confirmed disagreements with Ahmed Ould Daddah, but denied press reports that he plans to resign from RFD, form a political party, and run for president. Baba deplored the junta's unilateral actions but made clear that he supports a "participative approach" rather than a boycott.

HANKINS